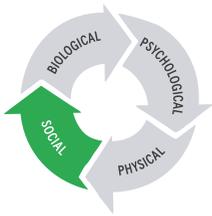


2. Support from other people with similar experiences and understanding

Hearing Voices Network groups



The main focus of this treatment is on social factors.



Remember, a sideways thumb just means not enough people have done research yet that shows that this approach works. This might be really helpful (and some people say it is), we just don't know for sure!

What is it?

The Hearing Voices Network is run by and for people who hear voices, noises, or have other unusual experiences of people speaking to them when no-one seems to be there. If you have these experiences, then the Hearing Voices Network is about 'peer' support – that's support from other people like yourself.

The Hearing Voices Network has peer support groups all over the country; these are based both within, and independent from, services. It is not a treatment but a source of support which may help you on your journey to recovery.

What does it aim to do?

The key idea behind the Hearing Voices Network is that unusual experiences are a reaction to trauma or other difficulties in life. You are supported to talk about your experiences in a way that makes sense to you, using the explanation that you find most helpful.

Through peer support, the groups aim to help you to find your explanation, and provide choices in how you might understand your experiences. Additionally you are encouraged to discuss ways of coping with these distressing experiences.

All hearing voices groups operate in slightly different ways, as the way they work and what they talk about is shaped by you and the others in the group.

Some groups let you just turn up on the day, and some ask that you contact the group first, to arrange to come. A hearing voice group is at its root, a peer support group. Most groups will have someone in an organising and helping role whose job is to take care of arranging and helping the group to run smoothly.

The group doesn't see a difference between mental health staff and service-users, anyone who goes to the group or helps to run it is an equal member, whatever their background.

“ The Hearing Voices Network provides a safe space where people can receive peer support and make sense of their experiences in a way that is meaningful to them. ”

Cassie, hearing voices group member

Anyone can attend a hearing voices group and most groups are happy for you to bring someone along for support if you want to. All members of the group are expected to 'join in'. There is no pressure to talk or share anything personal though – 'joining in' just means listening.

Hearing voices groups are confidential – so what you say in the group is private and no-one will talk about it outside the group, or tell anyone else what you say – and what you talk about is varied to best support you and the others in the group. Many hearing voices groups also run a social programme i.e. social get togethers and events, that you can go to, or even organise if you want to.

Does it work?

The Hearing Voices Network was started by a psychiatrist called Marius Romme. Marius began to question whether unusual experiences, like hearing voices, were a symptom of an illness.

He realised he had not been listening to other people's views, and that it might be better to let people decide for themselves what was or wasn't real.

He brought people together who heard voices and gave them a space to talk about this experience. Those who heard voices felt more free and more in control because they could talk about their voices, without being diagnosed or judged.

👂👂 Hearing people speak in the group and attending events has given me the courage to find an understanding of mental health issues in a way that I feel comfortable with. 🗨️🗨️

Jack, hearing voices group member

Quite a few people who go to hearing voices groups go on to run and set up their own groups, and the whole Hearing Voices Network is run by people who hear voices and have been to these groups.

Because all the groups are different, and members run the groups themselves, no-one has 'tested' whether hearing voices groups 'work'; but there is some early support for the benefits of peer support (see below) which is a key part of hearing voices groups.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)

NICE does recommend peer support as part of a package of support and as one way to help with recovery.

How can I get this treatment?

Hearing voices groups are not a treatment, and instead offer a space to talk and an offer of support. There are hundreds of hearing voices groups across the country. To find a group go to the Hearing Voices Network website – hearing-voices.org – and look for the group nearest to you.

Many groups also have social networking sites you can access. Those working within NHS services may also know of local hearing voices groups that are available to attend.

✔ Main pro

Hearing voices groups are an opportunity to meet other people with similar experiences to you and to talk without being judged, in complete confidence and in a way that you find most helpful.

✘ Main con

Attending a group can be a bit scary at first. To help with this, you can bring someone along for support, or get in touch with the group before you come, to ask any questions or discuss anything that's worrying you.